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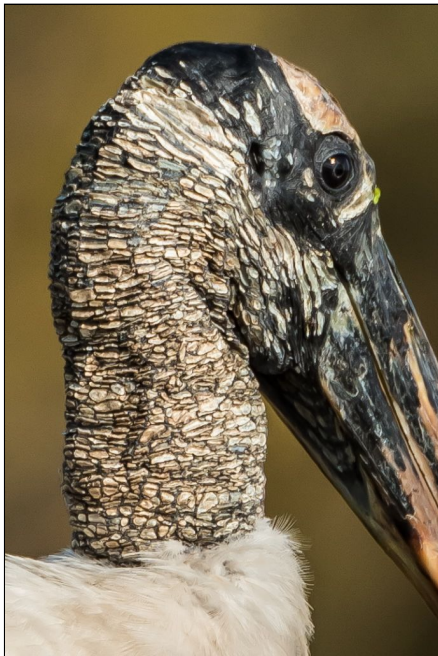
Birds, such as the Woodstork, at Green Cay Wetlands in Boynton Beach, Florida, are quite comfortable with visitors

MODERN DAY DINOSAURS

Yes, descendants of dinosaurs do live among us in our modern world. Birds! While not in the direct lineal line of the terrifying tyrannosaurus rex, or the monstrous 38-ton brontosaurus, birds trace their ancestry back one hundred fifty million years to archaeopteryx, the first known feathered and winged dinosaur

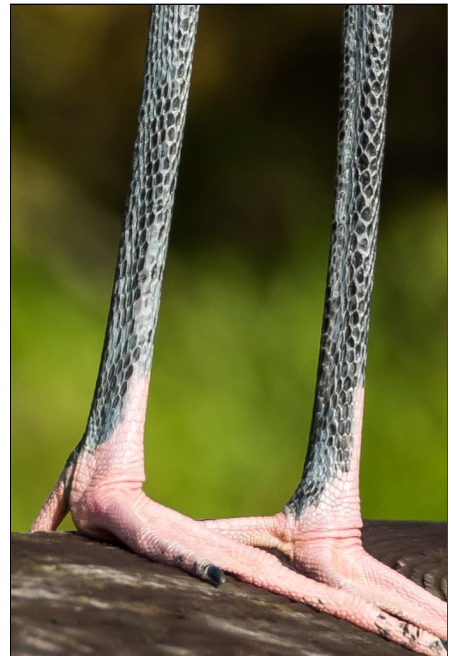
during the Jurassic period.

Ever since the days of Darwin, there has been disagreement on the evolution of birds, but in the last decade discoveries of many more fossils have filled in various evolutionary blanks, so that scientists can now say with certainty that today's birds are descendants of yesterday's dinosaurs. Interestingly, as the early dinosaur/birds took flight they lost their dinosaur type tails, became smaller, and their wings became more efficient, enabling them to successfully compete then as they do now. In fact, it is quite likely that the ability to fly and change locations saved them from whatever disaster doomed their larger more fearsome dinosaur kin. Notwithstanding the overwhelming evidence, as with global warming, there are those who deny the science and still do not accept



this evolutionary version of birds; and if you think about it, hummingbirds do seem to be very foreign from any concept of dinosaurs that we have ever had.

If birds today don't look anything like dinosaurs, what is the evolutionary origin of some of today's creatures that do bear some resemblance to dinosaurs? How about alligators, iguanas or armadillos? Believe it or not, alligators are more closely related to birds than one might expect, as they are both descended from a common ancestor, but diverged down different paths well before archaeopteryx came on the scene. Iguanas and lizards also stem back to ancestors that long predate birds, but are not in the same evolutionary line that produced birds; and armadillos,



even though they have thick horny scales and date back to the same



evolutionary line that later produced stegosaurus, are actually mammals, and are not considered dinosaur related.

On a recent trip to Green Cay Wetlands in Boynton Beach, Florida, a very accommodating Woodstork posed on the railing of the boardwalk, allowing birders, (and the ever present walkers) to pass close by and offer an excellent photo op. Actually, birds at Green Cay and the similar nearby Wakodahatchee are so accustomed to people that they remain comfortable in their environment undisturbed by we humans snuggling up to them. By examining in detail the neck and legs of the Woodstork, we are able to discern some of the dinosaur type features that seemed to have survived into the present day.

Some derogatorily refer to Florida as the "Land of the Dinosaurs" referring to we senior citizens who have migrated from elsewhere and tend to congregate here; but if birds are today's dinosaurs, Florida is indeed the land of the dinosaurs. We can just be glad they are no longer the mega ton behemoths that roamed the swamps, fields and forests millennia ago. Could you just imagine tyrannosaurus rex rampaging across a mall parking lot on his way to a dumpster now frequented by Grackles and Starlings?

There is a wealth of information online regarding the origins of birds, alligators, iguanas and armadillos as descended from dinosaurs. Here are a few: www.nhm.org/site/research-collections/dinosaur-institute/dinosaurs/birds-late-evolution-dinosaurs; news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/09/140925-bird-dinosaur-evolution-burst-science/; and www.quantamagazine.org/20150602-dinosaurs-to-birds/.



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